



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Death penalty should be option

If there was ever a case where the death penalty must be carefully considered, it is taking shape in Colorado right now. Prosecutors are deciding whether to pursue the death penalty in the case of James Holmes, who is accused of 166 counts of murder and attempted murder in last year's theater shooting in Aurora.

Colorado has been on something of a liberal binge lately, passing laws legalizing marijuana and making movements toward allowing same-sex unions. However, the death penalty still exists in Colorado. The state has executed just one person (in 1997), and there are three people sitting on death row now, but it remains an option.

The death penalty is something that should never be imposed lightly. It is the extreme and final measure of punishment available under the law, and should only be enacted in the most extreme of cases and should be carefully considered in every case.

The problem in this case comes from the defense, which has said in court documents that it may plan to pursue an insanity defense. Most states as well as the federal courts have been reluctant to order executions for the mentally ill and are more likely to order treatment. However, the time when mental health treatment benefits society in cases like this is before something like the Aurora or Sandy Hook shootings occur. After the fact, it does little good. Even if Holmes were found insane by the court, can you imagine there were any circumstances where they would allow him back into society? What good would rehabilitation do?

This isn't Holmes' only method of defense. The prosecution has rejected an offer by the defendant to plead guilty and accept life in prison. They called it a tactic designed to generate publicity.

Society has a right to protect itself from those who would harm it. Crimes like mass shootings are incredibly harmful to society beyond the victims and their immediate families. How many people stayed away from the movies after Aurora? How many parents kept their kids home from school after Columbine? How many schools have tried to become fortresses after Sandy Hook? These terrorist acts rip at the very fabric of our way of life.

We must do all we can to try and prevent these crimes without infringing on the freedoms of law-abiding citizens, but when one happens, what then? No punishment will bring back those who died, but society must still mete out punishment.

The death penalty is not the only option in this or any other case, but it should remain one of the options.

— Kevin Bottrell, Goodland Star-News

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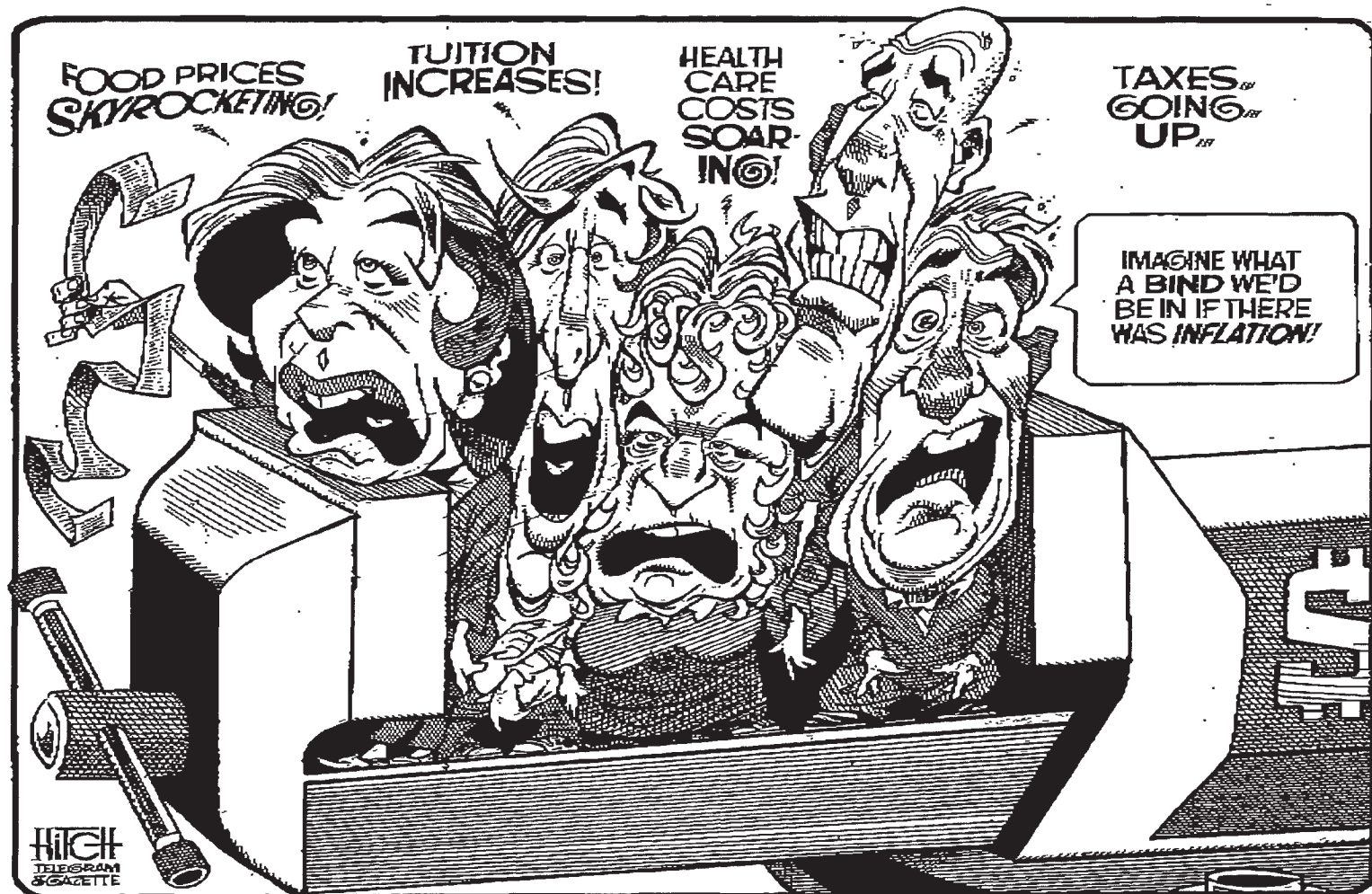
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A (VISE) GRIP ON REALITY

### Knowing someone can still get you in

A fifth grader can't get into the White House these days, what with sequestration cutbacks by the Secret Service, but apparently, those with a meeting or who know somebody inside still can.

I have to say I was a little surprised when we got the invitation. I'd met Jim last year when he spoke to Associated Press editors and publishers in Kansas City. It turned out we had a lot in common — we'd both worked at the old *Kansas City Times* before it was merged into *The Star*, me from 1969 to 1980, him from about 1983 to '87.

So while our paths hadn't exactly crossed, we knew the same characters, the same editors, many of the same coworkers and sat at nearly the same desk. We talked that night, and Jim said, "When you get to Washington, look me up."

And when we made plans to attend a meeting in March, I sent him an e-mail. I followed up a week or so before we left, and Jim responded that he thought we could get together on Friday, after our meeting was over. And he thought he could get us onto the White House grounds for the president's arrival back from a speech in Chicago.

I guess you could say we were interested. Neither of us had been to the White House since we took the tour as teenagers. This was different. Jim got permission to invite us, then had us cleared by the Secret Service. We'd been through that to go to meetings at the Old Executive Office Building next door, which is on the grounds.

Jim said he'd meet us outside the entrance. We took the subway from our hotel, then walked down to Pennsylvania Avenue, where we waited on the sidewalk and amused our-



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

selves by watching the tourists and the nut case protesters camped in the park. You can't say America doesn't honor free speech, though the White House cops keep a watchful eye.

After Jim came out, the gate guards cleared us through the metal detectors and issued us temporary press passes. Then we got to walk into the press area, past the permanent outdoor sets of the television networks. You know the ones where the correspondent stands with the White House in the background for a brief report at whatever time it is. These are complete with lights and sound systems.

Jim gestured to "high press," the corner of the West Wing where the press secretary and communications director have their offices, and "low press," where the lesser press aides work in one end of the corridor connecting the White House itself to the West Wing.

We went into the briefing room, which is not all that big and unbelievably cramped with all the lights and television cameras. He took us to the AP's office, no bigger than a large closet, with five work stations hung on the walls.

"But we have a window," Jim said.

Only the two wire services, AP and Reuters, have windows, it seems; the rest of the press and all the networks are crammed into the basement. All in all, it's not what you'd expect from the nerve center of the Free World.

But then Jim likes to say, "the best thing about working at the White House is telling people you work at the White House." It's a lot of tedium and waiting, he said, interspersed with occasional moments of manic intensity when things are happening. The arrival was a good example.

Every presidential arrival and departure is covered, though mostly by a pool representing print and broadcast media. Usually, nothing more happens than the president waving to the reporters and cameras as he walks either to the residence or the Oval Office.

But he might say something, take a question or have a Gerald Ford moment and trip on the steps of the helicopter.

So no one wants to miss an event. And there we were, lined up with the television cameramen, still photographers, a handful of reporters, all behind a polite chain. The press aide in charge signaled "O" for Oval Office so the cameramen would know where to aim. The helicopters buzzed in, the two not hauling the president flew by and Marine 1 landed.

First a Marine guard got out and let down the rear door. Secret Service agents took up their positions. Then the president emerged, returned a salute, walked to the Oval Office, waving to the press line as he went. And that was that.

Jim took us for a drink at an oyster bar across the street, and we made plans to have dinner "next time." A dull day in the life of a White House correspondent, perhaps, but a memorable side trip for a couple of country editors.

Steve Haynes is president of NorWest Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

### Bills passed for licenses, screening, guns

Some quick notes of interest:

- Senate Bill 68 passed the House. That should mean that we can get commercial driver's license renewals at the county courthouse soon.

- This week, the House passed a bill allowing screening of welfare and unemployment recipients if there is a reasonable suspicion of drug use. The goal is to help them re-enter the workforce and find jobs. Benefits for children of recipients who test positive would continue to be paid through a third-party payee, who also would have to submit to a drug test.

- The House passed a bill this past week updating concealed carry laws to allow for transfers from other states that meet or exceed license requirements in Kansas.

- An important issue that is a great example of how conference committees work: Last week, the Senate approved S Sub HB 2052, a bill concerning guns in public buildings that would require school boards to either allow concealed carry in school, provide extensive



Ward Cassidy

- This week in Topeka

security measures or get a four-year exemption by adopting an alternative security plan.

The House version of this bill would have exempted school districts from this requirement. Both bills allow school boards to permit employees with concealed carry licenses to bring weapons into schools regardless of whether the school is posted to prohibit guns. The House can either agree to the Senate version or request a conference committee to discuss the differences and support its own position.

- This is going to be a very difficult week. I believe that we will try to pass a budget and a

tax plan before we get out of here on Friday. Friday is the official "turn around" day. We do not return until May 8. I get to come back two days in April to work with the Appropriations Committee to finish the budget bill.

This has been a long session, and I have not had the chance to be home very often. I am looking forward to being in northwest Kansas. I will be in the district several times in April, or you can always contact me at ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives, covering the northwest part of Thomas County (including Colby), plus Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman and Wallace counties. This is his second term in the Legislature, and he is chair of the Education Budget Committee and vice chair of the Education Committee. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

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